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19 February 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Secretary, USIB

SUBJECT : Response to Memorandum for USIB of 12 February 1962,
"Review of Advance Intelligence Pertaining to the Berlin
Wall and Syrian Coup Incidents" [redacted]

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1. The draft memorandum from Mr. McGeorge Bundy, "Review of Advance Intelligence Pertaining to the Berlin Wall and the Syrian Coup Incidents," which in general charges the intelligence community with laxity in failing to come to grips with indications that actions by the Communists were imminent, does not discriminate among the several organs of positive intelligence interpretation whose responsibilities as to the Berlin and Syrian events were distinct and disparate. The 30 October memorandum for the President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence, submitted by the Director, NIC, for the Watch Committee, noted that "The Watch Committee's concern with Syria and the UAR has always been in terms of the outbreak of Arab-Israeli hostilities and the possibilities for Soviet Bloc exploitation of the consequent situation; the Watch Committee has not concerned itself with the internal stability of the UAR." With regard to Berlin, the Watch Committee and the NIC, during the summer of 1961, considered their role to have certain bounds set by their mission as defined in their charter and by the recognition of the roles of other intelligence bodies, the two most important of which from the standpoint of the Watch Committee were the Berlin Committee of USIB and the Board of National Estimates. The mission of the Watch Committee and its operational staff, the National Indications Center, is: "To provide the earliest possible warning to the United States Government of hostile action, or of impending developments that could eventuate in hostile action, by the Sino-Soviet Bloc, which endanger the security of the United States."* Therefore, the primary responsibility of the Watch Committee and of the NIC is and remains that of warning of the imminence of hostilities by the Bloc and of identifying and interpreting those aspects of critical situations which could result in hostile action by the Bloc. The Watch Committee therefore gave primary consideration to the question of its main conclusion, i.e., whether a Sino-Soviet Bloc

*Extract from DCID No. 1/5 eff 7 March 1961

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country intended to initiate hostilities in the immediate future. The status of Bloc forces in Europe and the Western USSR was therefore under careful and continuing scrutiny by the Watch Committee and by the NIC because of the obvious immediate and potential criticality of the Berlin situation. Possible actions by the Communists which might involve US forces were under constant examination. These included indications that the Soviets would turn over access controls to the East Germans or would sign a separate peace treaty (the presumption being that controls might then be transferred) and that popular disorder might break out in East Germany.

2. The subject memorandum points out that over a period of 11 months

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[redacted] the refugee flow "through West Berlin had reached proportions which were intolerable to the East German regime and that the only alternative remaining to Ulbricht was a sealing of the borders, if the Communists wished to shut off the refugee flow." There was a general recognition in the intelligence community that the refugee flow had reached such serious proportions that the Communists would feel impelled to take some action to curtail the flow. Although the details of the refugee flow from East Germany were not considered the prime responsibility of the Watch Committee or of the NIC, they were fully aware and appreciative of their significance. In retrospect, it may appear that the sealing of the sector borders in Berlin was the most appropriate method of shutting off the refugee flow. The question which confronted the estimative, current intelligence and warning (Watch Committee) process was to determine the specific nature and timing of the action which the Communists might choose to take. Among the various courses of action open to the Communists, but not the only course, was the closing of the sector border. Other possibilities included the imposition of more stringent controls on the travel of individuals in East Germany from their homes and the placing of strict regulations on travel on the routes to East Berlin. No less an observer

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3. The subject memorandum suggests a failure by intelligence analysts to pull together all the pertinent information as the basis for a meaningful appraisal

The point of course is that there is a mass of reports on most significant intelligence problems, and the fact that all of them do not appear in the final finished intelligence product does not indicate that they were not considered in arriving at the intelligence judgment. The possibility that the sector borders might be sealed was considered as a possible course of action, as has been noted above. The fact that

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4. The subject memorandum further notes that the "best indicator was Ulbricht himself" and cites an address by him on 10 August that "We have discussed the (refugee) matter with our Soviet friends and with representatives of the Warsaw Pact states, and we have agreed that the time has come when one must say 'so far and no farther.'" This reference presumably is from a speech by Ulbricht on a domestic television program on 10 August. It is rendered as follows in the FBI's Daily Report for 11 August: "We have consulted with our Soviet friends and the representatives of all states of the Warsaw Pact and we have agreed that we can no longer tolerate the abuse of our patience. We have agreed that the time has come when the border crossers must be asked to perform honest work at their place of residence, the capital of the GDR, when they must cease to be exploited by West Berlin capitalists and to be abused by militarist and agent organizations." The quotation from Ulbricht as rendered by FBIS no more suggests a Wall than it does increased restrictions on travel. It is dangerous to take the statements of the

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Communists at face value in any case. In this connection we would call attention to Ulbricht's press conference on 15 June which is quoted verbatim as follows:

Question: . . . Mr. Chairman, does the setting up of a free city in your view imply that the state frontier will be at the Brandenburg Gate, and are you determined to consistently treat it as such with all its consequence?

Ulbricht: The meaning of your question, as I see it, is that there are people in West Germany who would like us to mobilize the building workers of the GDR capital to put up a wall. I am not aware of any such intention, since the building workers in our capital are chiefly engaged in the housing program, and their time is fully occupied. Nobody intends to put up a wall. As I said before, we are in favor of a contractual settlement of relations between West Berlin and the GDR Government. This is the simplest and most normal way to solve these questions.

5. We have reexamined the 27 October memorandum from the Director, NIC, referred to above and have concluded that its validity is not impugned by the contents of the subject memorandum of Mr. Bundy. We do not believe that the evidence available to the community at the time of the Watch Committee meeting of 9 August or even at midnight on 12 August was sufficient to support a conclusion that the Communists had decided to close the sector border, nor does the subject memorandum, even in retrospect, adduce any definitive reports or indications to this effect.

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tabled for consideration the following conclusion: "While we regard any significant outbreak as unlikely at this time, a Communist move to seal off Berlin would be likely to increase existing unrest in East Germany. The initial steps in such a move may be imminent." This proposal, by inference, suggested that the method by which the refugee flow would be halted would be by the sealing of the access routes from

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East Germany to East Berlin. After considerable discussion the Committee decided that there was insufficient evidence to warrant a conclusion. The NIC is the process

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